

Reports on Physician And Nurse Manpower Problems

The Ninth National Conference on Rural Health, sponsored by the American Medical Association's Council on Rural Health, was held at Dallas, Tex., on March 4-6, 1954. Two of the conference papers, presented in condensed form below, offer solutions to the problem of physician distribution and the problem of nurse recruitment.

A Program for Improving Physician Distribution



Distribution of physicians is a particular problem in Texas because of the vast size of the State and the sparse population in many areas. There are certain areas in Texas, as elsewhere in the Nation, where a physician cannot live and earn a living, but there are many areas where a better distribution of physicians can and must be provided.

In May 1952, the House of Delegates of the Texas Medical Association authorized the formation of the Committee on Doctor Distribu-

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tion to determine the exact conditions concerning distribution of physicians and to work with those communities that have been unable to secure or keep a physician.

Physician and Community Surveys

The committee's first step was to ask the physicians themselves what they thought conditions were. Questionnaires were mailed to approximately 6,500 physicians, and replies were received from about 6,000. They provided information concerning the ratio of physicians to population, type of practice, percentage of time spent in practice, number of miles traveled in making house calls, number of patients seen daily, and hospital facilities available. Each physician was asked if he believed his community needed more physicians, and if so, whether the community would support them.

The next step was to contact the communities. The committee is now in the process of writing directly to the secretaries of the chambers of commerce, the mayors, or the county judges and asking them for their opinion as to whether or not additional physicians are needed. They are advised that, unless they respond, the committee will assume their needs are being met adequately. They are informed also that if they feel a shortage of physicians exists, the Texas Medical Association will send a competent representative to visit the community.

Before a community is contacted, each physician in the area and the officers of the county medical society are informed of exactly what the association is doing. In this way, their cooperation and support is obtained.

Committee Assistance

To help the community determine whether or not a shortage of physicians actually exists and also to emphasize that securing and keeping a physician is the joint responsibility of the medical profession and the community, the committee has prepared a booklet posing such questions

as these: Will the community actually support a physician or will it bypass him when serious illness arises and send its patients to the nearest large city? Are office facilities available? Is prescription service accessible? What hospital or clinical facilities exist? What housing facilities are available? What types of schools and churches does the community have? The booklet suggests that the community appoint a committee to answer these questions and, if necessary, to send a letter requesting assistance in securing additional physicians to the Texas Medical Association's physicians' placement bureau. The booklet is sent with the initial communication to the community.

At present, the committee is planning to send into the communities indicating a shortage of physicians, an association official to work with local officials in analyzing the extent of the need. Recently employed, this official will start to work in the near future. With guidance of the American Medical Association, the committee has prepared a questionnaire which it believes will clearly show whether or not the community can and will support an additional physician or physicians.

Coordinated Activities

The program of the Committee on Doctor Distribution supplements, and in no way replaces, the work of the Texas Medical Association's physicians' placement service. Once a community clearly demonstrates its need for a physician, it is the job of the placement service to get one there as soon as possible. During 1953, this service placed 38 general practitioners in rural communities in Texas. At present, 34 communities are listed with this office as needing additional physicians, and 60 general practitioners are listed as seeking locations. An additional 64 general practitioners are listed as available in the coming months.

The Texas Medical Association is also working to create a reservoir of physicians for tomorrow. The University of Texas Medical Branch, in cooperation with the association and the Texas Academy of General Practice, has an active preceptorship program. Under this program, each senior medical student must apprentice himself for 11 weeks to an approved

preceptor before he can graduate. He lives and works in private practice with his "father in medicine." Since the beginning of this program in July 1952, there has already been a sharp increase in the number of senior students indicating that they desire to practice in rural areas.

Girls' Club Interest In Hospital Fields



Attractive high school girls consuming cookies by the dozen but performing a community service and, perhaps more important, learning about professions in which there is an ever-increasing need in this country for personnel are the JUG's of Akron, Colo. The JUG's, which stands for Just Us Girls, is a club for high school girls which was organized in 1950 to interest them in nursing and allied fields.

The need for such a program in Akron became apparent when plans were made for building a new 22-bed county hospital and the problem of obtaining staff was encountered. Considering the problem a long-range one, the Washington County (Colo.) Public Hospital decided that an attempt to interest girls in the community in the hospital fields was a logical approach. We realized that the more girls recruited for training from the community, the more chances the hospital would have of obtaining the necessary professional staff.

The idea of a club which would provide an opportunity for high school girls to become familiar with the hospital fields by actually working in them was advanced as one possible means of stimulating interest. The idea was discussed with the principal and some of the

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teachers of the local high school, and the school officials agreed to cooperate and support such a project. They recognized that hospital work could well be considered one of the chief vocations for young girls in this rural area.

Clubs for teen-agers interested in nursing, of course, are not new. The Future Nurses Clubs, for example, which were pioneered in Michigan, are well established, especially in the eastern States. The Candy Strippers of East Orange, N. J., are a very progressive group of junior high school girls. Apparently, however, little effort has been put forth in developing such clubs in rural areas, where, with the increasing number of hospitals, the need is just as great, if not greater, than in urban areas.

Organization and Activities

As soon as school support for the project was obtained, a questionnaire was given to each of the 80 girls in the high school. Fifty of them indicated that they were interested, and designated the particular hospital work in which they would like to participate. The hospital auxiliary of Washington County, in which Akron is located, accepted the challenge of sponsoring the club, and three persons were selected as individual leaders: the hospital superintendent, a member of the hospital auxiliary, and a member of the school faculty chosen by the girls.

The club was organized and ready to function by the time the move to the new hospital was made.

There are five different types of activities from which the JUG's may choose: They may serve as regular nurses' aides, or patients' aides as we prefer to call them, who perform such duties as arranging flowers, passing food trays, taking temperatures, and making beds. Recently, members of this group have been assigned to travel with the county public health nurse on her visits to schools, clinics, and classes for mothers. The nurses' aide group is the one in which most girls are interested. Girls who are interested in dietetics or home economics may help in the kitchen, preparing food and trays for patients. Another group works in the laboratory and X-ray room, filing cards and

simply observing; they may someday be interested in becoming medical technologists. Girls who like office work man the hospital's front desk, where they type, file, answer the phone, and direct visitors. Still others assist with occupational therapy, teaching the patients arts and crafts.

At the beginning of the school term, each patients' aide is given 10 hours of class instruction. Then she is ready to wear a uniform and to go to work on the floor at the hospital. After 100 hours of volunteer service, a JUG is entitled to an award pin, available through the American Hospital Association, and, after learning some 30 special procedures, she is eligible to wear a cap. The JUG's in the other service groups are given no formal training. They learn on the job, through experience. They also wear a uniform and receive an award pin, but no cap is awarded. A JUG may receive pay after she has finished 100 hours of volunteer service, but most JUG's donate their services.

The Club's Progress

The club in 1954 has 35 members. Interest in the organization is expressed even by kindergarten pupils, whose ambition is to "grow up and be a JUG." To recruit new members and thus keep the club active, a JUG visits the eighth grade class each year shortly before school is out and describes its program, and each year some 20 new members are pledged.

Admittedly, most of the girls enter the club not because they are especially interested in hospital work but because it is the thing to do. But they can be expected to leave with sufficient understanding of the work to know whether or not nursing, dietetics, medical technology, or occupational therapy is a profession in which they would like to seek a career.

Some of the JUG's have continued with their interest in nurses' training: 8 girls have gone into schools of nursing; 1 girl is studying to be a medical librarian; 1 girl is attending a laboratory and X-ray technician training school; and 6 girls are doing medical secretarial work.